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FEMALE AIR FORCE PILOTS AND COMBAT AIRCRAFT
"THE RIGHT STUFF HAS NO GENDER"

MAJOR SANDRA L. BATEMAN

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"insights into tomorrow"

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"THE RIGHT STUFF" HAS NO GENDER

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PREFACE

During the past ten years, female pilots, navigators, and crewmembers have been fully integrated into the United States Air Force. They presently fly all aircraft except those determined to be combat related. Women are restricted from these aircraft due to a 1948 law passed by Congress that excluded female pilots from flying aircraft while engaged in combat missions.

This article argues that one's gender does not determine whether an individual has "the right stuff" to fly combat aircraft. In doing so, it covers a brief history of female pilots, examines the combat exclusion and its consequences, looks at some myths concerning female pilots in combat, and reviews the law's present status in the 100th Congress.

In addition, the article tries to uncover the reason Congress cannot bring itself to amend a law which has outlived its usefulness and has become a hindrance to Air Force readiness.

Subject to clearance, this manuscript will be submitted to Minerva, Ms Magazine, Cosmopolitan, Air University Review, and International Combat Arms for consideration.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Bateman obtained her commission through Officer Training School in December 1974. She completed ground control intercept (GCI) training at Tyndall AFB, Florida, and was then assigned to the 24th NORAD region, Malmstrom AFB, Montana, as a GCI controller. In 1976, Major Bateman served a remote assignment at Wallace Air Station, Philippines, and in early 1978 transferred to Clark Air Base as the range safety officer for the 1st Test Squadron's weapons system evaluation program. Later that year, she changed career fields and became the protocol officer for Headquarters 13th Air Force, Clark Air Base. She then transferred to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, where she served as assistant chief of protocol, Headquarters PACAF, from 1979 to 1982. Her next assignment was McChord AFB, Washington, where she was squadron section commander for the 62d Civil Engineering Squadron and later, the 62d Aerial Port Squadron. In 1984, Major Bateman transferred to Altus AFB OK as Commander, 443d Services Squadron until 1986 when she entered ACSC in residence at Maxwell AFB AL. Her military decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters and Air Force Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster.

FEMALE AIR FORCE PILOTS AND COMBAT AIRCRAFT

"THE RIGHT STUFF" HAS NO GENDER

Women have volunteered to serve their country in combat throughout history displaying numerous examples of courage, heroism, and combatant skills (23:66). Yet, women are still faced with disbelievers concerning their combatant abilities. In the book Female Soldiers--Combatants or Noncombatants, Jeff Tuten states, "Women's unsuitability for combat is made apparent by the fact that they have never engaged in it. Thus . . . women are unsuited for combat" (3:239). This continuing problem is best exemplified by female pilots in the United States Air Force who are still prevented from flying aircraft that could be engaged in combat missions. The question that begs to be answered is why?

Before I address the question of the combat exclusion, I first want to ensure the reader understands what this article is not about. It is not a discussion on whether women should be drafted. It is not about females fighting hand-to-hand combat. It is not about women serving on combat vessels in the Navy. This article is specifically restricted to those women who have volunteered and been selected to serve in the United States Air Force as pilots, navigators, and aircraft crewmembers. These women, though fully trained and capable, have been excluded from operating certain aircraft which are considered combat related. One must remember the Air Force is a unique service. It fights its battles in the air and a combat engagement requires skill, cunning, courage, and that evasive quality known as "the right stuff"--none of which are gender specific. A seemingly harmless and protective measure for females becomes, under close scrutiny, the very core of inequality and discrimination based on gender.

In the search to understand how this situation could exist in America today, we must look at Title 10, US Code, of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. Section 8549 made it unlawful for AF females to fly aircraft on combat missions regardless of their capabilities, training, or time in service. In trying to understand the reason Congress included the combat exclusion in its legislation and why it remains today, I will first explore the history of female pilots who volunteered to serve their country. Next, I will review Section 8549 of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in depth to determine if such a provision is discriminatory in relation to current laws and social attitudes. I will then examine the law's constraints

to mission readiness and dispel prevailing myths on why AF women should not fly combat missions. Finally, I will review the present environment within the 100th Congress and the possibility a discriminatory law enacted 39 years ago could be repealed or revised.

THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED

In exploring the history of female pilots, one should be aware that Congressional opposition to women serving their country in combat was also evident during the formation of the now completely accepted and indispensable nursing corps. It is interesting to compare the beginnings of the military nurse corps to the evolution of female military pilots.

The record of Civil War nurses provides one of the finest examples of dedication, ability, and simple courage to be found in American military history. Yet, military leaders were not ready to accept the fact that female nurses were an integral part of an effective medical service. So, when the war ended in 1865, the Army reverted to the practice of using enlisted men for patient care and sent the females home (5:8). Again during the Spanish-American War more than 1,500 female nurses volunteered to serve at home and abroad. Even so, opposition to granting military status to nurses remained strong simply and only because they were women. Then Surgeon General George Sternberg was reluctant to have women with the troops in the field, expressing concern that women would probably need luxury items not necessary for men. In spite of his concerns, he soon found female nurses were invaluable in the field and requested commissions for female doctors. Congress responded that only persons "physically, mentally and morally qualified" could be commissioned, and women were obviously not physically qualified (5:8-14). That was accepted as fact in 1917. In 1948 Congress exempted AF female medical personnel from the combat exclusion so they could serve aboard aircraft flying into combat areas and in war zone field hospitals (12:CRS 9).

Ironically, in 1987 female pilots are still exempt from flying those same aircraft (C-130s) which could carry female nurses to war zones. This could lead one to the dubious conclusion that Congress no longer sees a need to protect all females from serving in combat areas, but only certain females, i.e. pilots and crewmembers, are to be thus protected. The question is why?

It is not surprising to find the evolution of women pilots in the AF closely resembles that of the nurse corps. It wasn't until late November, 1941, as we faced WW II with severe manpower shortages, that the Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall, told Congress, "Women certainly must be employed in the overall effort of this nation. . ." (5:23). In August, 1943, an auxiliary unit named the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) was formed and more than 1,070 WASPs served their country through 1944. Thirty-seven WASPs were killed and thirty-six injured while performing duties as pilots, copilots, and students. In all, women ferry pilots completed 12,650 missions, encountering the same flying conditions and problems faced by male pilots. They sometimes

guarded their own planes at understaffed airfields, and frequently flew open-cockpit aircraft in subzero weather (10:262-263). In January, 1944, General Hap Arnold and the Army Air Corps had sought congressional approval of full military status for the women pilots, but in June, 1944, the bill was defeated on the House floor and the WASPs were deactivated in December. On 7 December 1944, General Arnold, Commanding General, Army Air Forces, stated to the last graduating class of the WASPs program:

You, and more than nine hundred of your sisters, have shown that you can fly wingtip to wingtip with your brothers. If ever there was a doubt in anyone's mind that women can become skillful pilots, the WASP have dispelled that doubt. It is on the record that women can fly as well as men. . . . If the need had developed for women to fly our aircraft overseas, I feel certain the WASP would have performed that job equally well.

Certainly we haven't been able to build an airplane you can't handle. . . . (10:310)

At the time of deactivation, 916 WASPs were on duty with the Army Air Corps. It is interesting to note that during the debate for full military status, Congress was deluged with letters from male pilot trainees, male civilian instructors and their friends who protested the militarization and instruction of women pilots while the men were being put in the "walking Army" (10:264). Congress' decision was obviously swayed by these male pilots and ignored the WASP's flying capabilities and devoted service to their country. Once again, women had been used by Congress to alleviate a manpower shortage and were soon forgotten. It was not until 33 years later, in 1977, that Congress granted the WASPs veterans status so they could receive the military benefits they so richly deserved.

Ironically, just four years after the WASP's deactivation women were fully integrated into the military by the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. During the hearings on the Integration Act, General Vandenberg, AF Chief of Staff, testified emphatically that the new AF, while it wanted women, had no intention of using them as pilots. The AF policy decision to exclude women from flying duties denied the opportunity to fly even to those women (WASPs) who had logged thousands of wartime hours in military aircraft (5:316). Could it be that the WASPs came too close to proving women had "the right stuff" to compete with men in the air, and the only way to ensure women remained "in their places" was to totally restrict them from flying AF aircraft? It took until 1975 to overcome this obvious gender discrimination, but, unfortunately, Congress still restricts female pilots from flying combat-related aircraft.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ACT

In order to sort out the reason Congress included the combat exclusion provision in the 1948 Act and to determine if it is still legal in 1987, one first needs to be aware of the exact wording of Section 8549:

The Secretary of the Air Force shall prescribe the military authority which female persons of the Air Force may exercise, and the kind of military duty to which they may be assigned: Provided, that they shall not be assigned to duty in aircraft while such aircraft are engaged in combat missions (13:373).

There was debate in Congress in 1948 but the issue was not whether women should be allowed to serve in combat; that was never seriously considered. It was instead how best to ensure that women would not be employed as combatants. Congress felt that delineating women's noncombatant position in the Air Force and Navy was a simple matter--just ban them from combat aircraft and ships. But, because the Army was unable to come up with an adequate definition of combat, Congress elected to leave the combat matter to be sorted out by the Secretary of the Army through Army policy, not law (5:118). Therefore, women in the Army are not prohibited from combat by law as in both the Air Force and Navy.

In actuality, the law provided the services with a convenient crutch for excluding women from any skill, position, or organization merely by declaring it combat or combat-related. The prohibition from duty in "combat aircraft engaged in combat missions" was initially interpreted by the Air Force to mean that all pilot jobs should be closed to women because a pilot should be available for duty in any type of aircraft on any type of mission at any time. This restrictive interpretation of the law automatically excluded women from participation in the primary mission of the Air Force, and their second-class status was thus assured (5:126-127)! As Major General Jeane Holm saw it:

Viewed in the context of the 1980s, Public Law 625 (Women's Armed Forces Integration Act) would be classified as a classic sexist legislation. But the law accurately reflected the prevailing cultural attitudes of the postwar period concerning women's roles and legal status (8:127).

Does the current law accurately reflect cultural and military attitudes concerning women and their legal status in 1987? Women have made great strides in their role as equal citizens since 1948, and Congress needs to accept the fact that there is no turning back the clock.

For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, As Amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, and Executive Order 11478 states:

Equal employment opportunity in the Federal Government prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin

in employment with the Federal Government. The law requires a federal agency to provide to all persons an equal opportunity to be hired and promoted into all types of jobs (1:16-17).

This law is extremely important to female Air Force personnel who remain in the service for extended periods of time. As Lois B. DeFleur and Rebecca L. Warner point out,

. . . the service, as it is currently structured, benefits men more than women. Although women have the potential to earn salaries in the military equal to men, they remain barred from occupational specialties that are associated with combat, which remain important for promotion to the highest ranks (14:12).

The combat exclusion is the root cause of the continuing discrimination against females in the Air Force and it is illegal based on the Equal Employment Act of 1972. Many social values and attitudes changed between 1948 and 1972, which is why Congress passed such strong legislation for equal opportunity. For unknown reasons, Congress cannot accept that these societal changes also encompass the idea of AF females in combat. All female pilots in the Air Force today are volunteers and the difference is that, for the first time in history, they are joining without a national wartime emergency in the making. In 1987, women join the Air Force for the same reasons other females become policewomen or firefighters. Simply because they have the ability to do the job and want to serve their country. They are not blind to the possible consequences of war or police action. But Congress continues to stick to the tired story "society" will not accept its "daughters" coming home in body bags (15:38). When will Congress stop thinking of women who devote 20 years of their life in training to defend their country as someone's daughter instead of the military professional they are proud to be?

Our most recent national tragedy is a stunning example of America's acceptance of female equality even when death is involved. When Christa McAuliffe and Judith Resnik were killed in the Challenger disaster in 1986, the country mourned their deaths equally with their five male crewmembers. No Despite the known dangers, there have been no restrictions placed on future space launches requiring male-only crews. Instead, Christa and Judith were praised for their bravery and heroism.

Why Congress believes society would react differently to trained, capable, volunteer female pilots is still a mystery. For example, in 1983 a sample of Maryland residents were asked, "Do you think that young women should be allowed to volunteer to fight in combat in the armed forces, or not allowed to volunteer to fight in combat in the armed forces, or don't you have any opinion on this?" Sixty-five percent--considerably more than a majority--answered that women should be allowed to volunteer for combat (14:45). In addition, even though the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) fell short of being ratified by the required three-fourths of the states, 36 states did ratify the amendment which would have allowed women in combat. In effect, by 1982 more than 50 percent of the population--"society"--had made it quite clear

they approve of women's full integration into the military, to include combat duties.

Even the Department of Defense (DOD) sent a proposal for repeal of the combat exclusion to Congress as early as May, 1979.

In November, 1979, the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee held hearings on the DOD proposal, but rather than being a debate on the merits of women flying combat aircraft and the need for flexibility in the utilization of Air Force personnel, the congressional subcommittee allowed the hearings to degenerate into a heated, emotional debate over women in combat with emphasis on ground combat and the horrors of war in general (5:339).

Why the congressional subcommittee would even allow testimony pertaining to ground combat (Army) when the combat exclusion law only pertains to the Air Force and Navy poses an interesting question. Could it be that there just wasn't enough credible opposition to females flying in combat, that listening to the horrors of ground combat gave the subcommittee a clearer conscience when they tabled the proposal?

Instead of allowing the emotional appeals concerning war in general, the subcommittee should have directed its energies toward the main issues involved. The first issue which was discussed by Major General Jeanne Holm (Retired) explained

. . . that the restrictive laws enacted in the post-WW II period had outlived their usefulness and had become counterproductive to the development of an optimum fighting force in the event of war. She argued that the service secretary should have the widest possible flexibility, particularly in time of war, to make personnel policy. The service secretaries should not be hamstrung in peacetime by laws they may not be able to live with in wartime (5:339).

Air Force Undersecretary Antonia Handler Chayes also testified in support of repeal due to a second overriding issue.

The question of equity--of equal opportunity to fight and die for country as opposed to the risk of death women have always faced in roles as nurses and other support functions during wartime. It is also a matter of equity for men who should not be forced into greater danger than the women who take the same oath and wear the same uniform. . . . what we achieve by barring women from combat roles is an obstacle to career advancement, and little advancement in protection (5:340).

Lawyer Diana A. Steele reminded the congressional subcommittee that ". . . men do not have a monopoly on patriotism, physical ability, desire for adventure, or willingness to risk their lives. Until both share in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, women will continue to be considered less than full-fledged citizens" (5:342).

It is also interesting to look at the arguments against repealing the combat exclusion. The Moral Majority testified "Leadership and authority are male attributes ordained by God and women in combat roles violates the order of creation, will of God" (5:342). Retired Navy Rear Admiral Jeremiah Denton said ". . . it would be moral and social insanity to subject women to war" (5:342). Retired Brigadier General Elizabeth P. Hoisington felt that mixing men and women in units in close situations gave rise to "man-woman relationships" problems that could cause "costly distractions" in combat (5:341). And Retired General William Westmoreland summed up the testimony against repeal by stating ". . . no man with gumption wants a woman to fight his battles" (5:397).

The above testimonies make it clear the combat exclusion law enacted in 1948 is presently outdated, discriminatory, and does not reflect the present attitudes toward women held by a majority of the American population. Congress must accept the fact in 1987 women have a new role in society which includes volunteering to defend their country.

MISSION CONSTRAINTS

Today, numerous women have volunteered and are now thoroughly integrated into the Air Force. In fact, they have advanced so far in key specialties that withdrawing them could seriously hamper the country's combat-readiness. Today even the words "combat" and "combat-support" are ambiguous. For example, a woman cannot fly a fighter or a bomber, but she can fly a tanker to refuel them. "In some cases, support positions may be more tempting enemy targets than the frontline posts," stated Mr. Lawrence Korb, past Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower. "Now let's have an intellectual exercise. You are a Soviet fighter pilot and you've got one missile. What do you shoot down? You get the tanker, you got the bombers!" (15:37)

No one expresses more frustration with the restriction than military women themselves. "Don't train me for a job and then tell me I can't do it because I'm female; that's a waste of the taxpayers' money and a waste of my time," says Lieutenant Diane Mills. She's an air-weapons director in an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) unit trained to direct fighters to intercept enemy aircraft (15:37).

As of fiscal year '85 there were 256 Air Force female pilots, 108 female navigators, and 194 crewmembers. In 1948, women comprised approximately 2 percent of the Air Force; in 1987 they comprise over 11 percent. Of the 300 Air Force job categories, only 4 (including the flying of fighter and bomber aircraft) are closed to women (16:36).

Presently, female pilots are precluded from combat. Or are they? When Grenada heated up, a number of female pilots flew troop and cargo-carrying missions to Grenada during the initial phases of the 1983 invasion. They landed on the Caribbean island aboard C-141 aircraft when US paratroopers were

still fighting Cuban troops. Said a male pilot who flew to Grenada: "The significant thing is that they went in, did the job alongside us, came out, and nobody made a huge fuss about it. Nobody made a special effort to include them and nobody thought for a moment about excluding women" (16:36). In addition, Major General William Mall, who commanded the first wave of air forces to hit the island, said, "To have excluded an aircraft from the mission simply because there was a woman on board would have lessened our response and reduced our effectiveness" (16:31).

Another example of how reality has overcome an outdated law is the anti-terrorist attack the Air Force flew against Libya in April, 1986. Seven women--six officers and one enlisted--served in the raid. One of the women was a backup pilot on a KC-135 tanker, and four served as co-pilots--three on KC-10s and one on a KC-135 (17:15). Air Force Secretary Edward Aldridge, Jr, stated, "Women flew on those aircrews as a natural evolutionary growth of the contribution of women members to the Air Force" (24:4). Congress cannot continue to "use" women to alleviate manpower shortages and at the same time impede mission readiness in the form of the combat exclusion. In her book Women in the Military, Major General Jeane Holm states,

It is time to end this charade and recognize that the entire defense establishment is a combat organization whose mission is to deter war and, when required, to fight. It is time Congress accepts that modern wars are "fought" not just by an elite class of people categorized as "combatants," but by all who serve (5:396).

SOME MYTHS

That brings us back to the original question of why Congress cannot bring itself to repeal the portion of Section 8549 which prohibits female pilots from flying aircraft engaged in combat missions. Let us look at some of the more prevalent reasons given for excluding women from combat which may be preventing Congress from acting on this issue.

First and foremost is the quote at the beginning of this article stating women have never fought in combat. Maybe Nadya Popova, a Russian bomber pilot during WW II, would disagree. In a recent interview, she sounded like she knew exactly what combat was:

We flew combat missions each night. With up to three hundred kilos of bombs strapped to our wings we took off an average of fifteen times a night, bombing railways, bridges, supply depots and troop positions that were heavily fortified with anti-aircraft guns. The planes were unheated and we suffered from frostbite and exposure. I could see burning planes crashing with my girlfriends in them. . . . (7:144)

Russia formed two bomber regiments and one fighter regiment in which women filled all aircrew and support positions. "During WW II women participated

with their male counterparts in every resistance organization in occupied Europe; they were captured, tortured, and executed by the Nazis in the same manner and proportion as men" (20:55). These combatants may not have been American but they were women and they fought as well as the men.

Another frequently heard belief supporting the female combat exclusion is females in fighter units will impede the "bonding cohesiveness" of the unit which will degrade mission effectiveness (21:53). The fact this has not happened in squadrons where females have flown for the past ten years does little to discourage the myth. Many female pilots have said once the men realized the women could fly as well as the men, the discrimination evaporated. Astronauts have to work closer together and under more extreme conditions than the average pilot, yet they have had no problems "bonding" with their female crewmembers. And dare we try to remember the ludicrous statements made concerning Black pilots when the Air Force was forced to integrate their flying squadrons? Lieutenant General James Doolittle made a statement concerning integration of flying units that is as appropriate for women today as it was for Blacks 40 years ago. "I don't like to be naive about this but I am convinced that the solution of the situation is to forget they are colored" (6:233). Good advice for Congress as they ponder the combat exclusion for women today.

Another principle theme is that women ought not to suffer the ordeal of being a prisoner of war, the implication being that women will suffer sexual abuse as well as the customary abuse of that status (21:52). One wonders why the Congress is so concerned with the possible sexual abuse of at most 400 rated female personnel (assuming they all were taken prisoner of war), when in 1974, 55,000 rapes occurred in the United States (4:7). By 1985, the number of forcible rapes had increased to 87,340 (11:13). In addition, a study done in 1978 concluded that in any one year about 1.8 million wives in the United States are beaten by their husbands (4:1). These figures are so astounding one must conclude that any testimony concerning women as prisoners is for sheer emotional impact. If Congress is so concerned about the physical well-being of American women, they don't need to wait for a war to protect them.

A related argument is that men are really more worried about how a female prisoner will affect the judgment of other military personnel (21:52). Will a male prisoner really react differently when a female is tortured vice his best flying buddy for the past five years? Not likely! These people are military professionals who are well aware that "war is hell" and are prepared for the consequences. It must also never be forgotten that women are no strangers to prison camps. During WW II at Ravensbruck concentration camp alone, over 65,000 allied civilian women died from starvation, disease, the gas chamber, and medical experimentation (7:61). The next war will spare no one, including civilians, from its horrors. The question remains why Congress continues to "protect" female military professionals.

Another reason given to keep women out of combat aircraft is the flight lead would be more protective of a female wingman and possibly get shot down

himself (22:17). It is well known that leaders always feel protective of their men and vice versa. There are numerous stories of untold bravery and heroism in order to save a "buddy's" life. In many cases these feats have resulted in award of the Congressional Medal of Honor for placing one's life at risk above and beyond the call of duty. For example, on 7 January 1945, over Los Negros Island, Major Thomas B. McGuire, Jr was killed while trying to save a comrade from attack by an enemy fighter. Would his bravery been viewed as protectiveness if the comrade had been female? Or Major Bernard F. Fisher who observed a fellow airman crashland on a damaged airstrip. "He believed the downed pilot was seriously injured and faced capture. Although aware of extreme danger and likely failure, he landed, taxied the length of the runway littered with battle debris, and effected the rescue" (9). Soldiers have always risked their lives for each other in war; hopefully they will continue to do so for their female comrades as well.

One of the final arguments the critics make is that there is no need to change the law at this time. "While true as far as it goes, it misses the point. It is precisely at this time when no emergency exists that action should be taken to carefully plan and implement measures that can be applied in an emergency" (23:66). It is now that Congress needs to allow the Secretary of the Air Force the flexibility to utilize his pilots in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible to adequately prepare for future conflicts.

THE OUTLOOK

In fact, there is new hope that Section 8549 could be repealed or revised during the 100th Congress. In late 1986, Senator William Proxmire, D-Wisconsin, said,

Current assignment policies do not really protect women from combat and are a waste of talent. The range and effectiveness of modern weapons make it impossible to isolate female soldiers from the danger of combat. The support jobs they are allowed to take are often as dangerous as the front-line jobs they are now prevented from taking. Women in the military is no longer an experiment, it is a reality that our assignment policies should reflect (18:3).

Senator William Cohen, R-Maine, said that,

"Every position should be available to every individual who possesses the necessary experience, qualifications, and motivation--regardless of gender. Women and men who have chosen to devote their lives to serving their country deserve their nation's commitment to ensure them equal opportunities" (18:3).

These statements are welcome in light of the Reagan Administration's opposition to removing the combat restrictions on women. On September 3,

1983, White House Spokesman Larry Speakes said, "The President strongly feels that women should not be sent into combat. That's bedrock Reaganism" (12:CRS-9). But it is now 1987 and we have a Democratic Congress. It has been a full eight years since DOD sent their first proposal to Congress for repeal of Section 8549. During those years, females in the Air Force have continued to meet all challenges and perform superbly (25:9).

As the 100th Congress starts charting the course for the future of our country, we must continue to ask the question--why are female pilots excluded from combat? We have seen not only American women but women of all nationalities have a rich heritage in defending their country. It has become obvious that Section 8549 of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act is no longer in consonance with society's attitudes toward women and, in fact, represents blatant discrimination of women based on laws passed by Congress since 1948. Numerous examples are cited which show that women are already fully integrated into the Air Force and that mission readiness will be degraded by continuing to exclude women pilots from flying combat aircraft. Finally, we have exposed the critics' excuses for what they are--myths propagated against a minority group to ensure exclusion from the most prestigious positions.

So the question remains with the only plausible answer being the same one that has plagued mankind for centuries--resistance to change for no real reason at all. Resistance to a modern military where smarts and skills are more important than biceps. Resistance to the fact that brains are unisex and great leaders can be male or female. Resistance to the fact that the last bastion of male chauvinism, flying combat aircraft, is slipping away (19:21). Resistance to the fact that "the right stuff" has no gender. As the 100th Congress starts debating this issue in 1987, it would do well to keep in mind the words of economist John Stuart Mill more than a hundred years ago:

Is there so great a superfluity of men fit for high duties, that society can afford to reject the services of any competent person? Are we so certain of always finding a man . . . for any duty or function of social importance which falls vacant, that we lose nothing by putting a ban upon half of mankind and refusing beforehand to make their faculties available, however distinguished they may be . . . ? (5:397)

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